

## **Annual Resident Directors' Meeting: March 13, 2009**

### **Session 1 : “When the Worst Happens”: Dealing with a Student Death**

Note: The sample protocol below has been adapted; all references to a specific institution and named staff members have been removed.

## **PROTOCOL: CHECKLIST FOR HANDLING A STUDENT FATALITY**

**Purpose:** This procedure is a guideline of steps to take upon learning of the death of a program student. Many decisions that will be made will be based on the actual circumstances of the fatality. The following steps should be followed as appropriate to the particular case.

As you begin the checklist, you should also begin a chronological written log, with a detailed description of the facts (or alleged facts) of the incident, including e-mails, basic notes, discussions with doctors, conversations with the student, the school, the faculty, and/or the family.

Be careful to respect student's privacy rights and confidentiality throughout the process.

*Contact Program or Center Director (in the event that emergency duty is being handled by another staff member) as soon as reasonably possible.*

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1. \_\_ Verify the identity of the student. Gather as much initial information as possible about the circumstances surrounding the student's death. Begin keeping a chronological written log, including e-mails; keep basic notes regarding circumstances, actions, etc.
  2. \_\_ Inform the police and local authorities as necessary. The Police will inform you of further action to take or not to take as necessary. This advice should be noted and followed.
  3. \_\_ Notify the appropriate person at your home institution (e.g., hierarchical superior) immediately.
  4. \_\_ Contact and inform U.S. institution's on-site representative of the situation. (i.e., accompanying faculty or academic director). Assess situation and discuss next steps.

*If U.S. institution's representative is inaccessible or unable to take authority in crisis situations, the Program or Center Director should know exactly whom to contact in order to obtain the home institution's approval of actions (e.g., Programs Abroad Director, legal counsel)*

**PROGRAM OR CENTER DIRECTOR SHOULD BE AWARE OF WHOSE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY IT IS TO DO THE FOLLOWING :**

5. \_\_\_ Notify family. A decision about how and by what means to notify the family must be made in consultation with the U.S. institution and the U.S. Embassy if necessary.

6. \_\_\_ Notify U.S. Embassy or Consulate (if student is not a U.S. citizen or permanent resident, notify embassy or consulate of citizenship). The Embassy will give instructions about how to proceed; these should be carefully noted and followed.

7. \_\_\_ Follow all instructions given by police, the Embassy, the student's insurance company (if applicable, the insurance company would have been notified by the family or U.S. institution), etc. **NOTE:** The student's passport is necessary for repatriation of the body. It should be located immediately and passed on to the appropriate authority. A receipt should be obtained if possible when turning the passport over.

*In a case like this, the Police, American Embassy, Coroner will work together and communicate with each other once they are notified. The Program Director may not be directly involved in these procedures, but should be available if information or assistance are requested.*

8. \_\_\_ Assist as needed in making arrangements and setting up meetings on site for the deceased student's family or legal guardians, i.e., travel arrangements & local accommodations, meetings with attending physicians, the police, etc.

9. \_\_\_ If parents or legal guardians do not come, the student's belongings must be packed and prepared for shipment. Special attention should be paid to valuable and important documents. A complete inventory of all items packed and shipped must be prepared. A copy should be kept on file. In France, it may be advisable to ask for a *huissier* to be present during this process.

**Assistance for other program students**

10. \_\_\_ Arrange for counseling services to be available/accessible to students as soon as possible. If other students were with the deceased student at the time of death, discovered the body, or if there were any other special circumstances, arrange appropriate support.

11. \_\_\_ Notify the student's roommates, close friends, and other key individuals as soon as

possible in an effort to manage the flow of information and keep rumors and “gossip” to a minimum. This should be done with care and only once a system is in place for supporting students when they are told.

12. \_\_ Notify the rest of the students in the program; ensure that group discussion, individual counseling, and on-call access to staff is available, to the extent possible.

13. \_\_ Notify all program administrative and teaching staff, as well as anyone with whom the students have regular contact (internship supervisors, local partner institutions and faculty, housing agencies and/or host families, etc.) so that they are aware of the situation and can deal sympathetically with program students.

14. \_\_ Complete and submit an Incident Report Form or other forms to the home institution in the U.S. (Note: This protocol should be shown to your direct supervisor or home institution’s legal counsel in the U.S. and approved by them.)